

Matthew Arnold was born on December 24, 1822 at Laleham, Middlesex, died April 15, 1888, Liverpool. After Reverend Preparatory School he entered Rugby School then attended Oxford as a scholar of Balliol College. In 1847 he was appointed as private secretary to Lord Lansdowne.

... the method of historical criticism, that great and famous power in the present day . . . The advice to study the character of an author and the circumstances in which he has lived, in order to account to oneself for his work, is excellent. But it is a perilous doctrine that from such a study the right understanding of his work will 'spontaneously issue'.

This quotation from one of the last and best of the critical essays of Matthew Arnold (line 822-88) suggests at once how untypical a Victorian critic he was, and how proudly he knew it. The 'great and famous power' of historical criticism, against which no other Victorian critic before the nineties raised his voice, seemed to him implausible and over-rated almost before it had established itself.

Arnold's defiance of the Victorian tradition of poetry began in reaction against himself. In 1849 he had startled his friends with a first collection of poems, *The Strayed Reveller*, where the bright young man just down from Oxford revealed himself as a melancholy romantic in love with solitude.

Three years later he issued a new collection of poems as *Empedocles on Etna*, and in 1853 replaced this drama of suicide with the miniature epic *Sohrab and Rustum*, and a preface written during the summer in reply to an anonymous and deprecating review of *Empedocles*. The preface to the *Poems* of 1853, written at the age of thirty-one, is the first of Arnold's prose works.

Arnold's criticism measures the distance between his ambition as a poet and his performance. A poet in the tradition of Keats, he seeks in his prose to extricate himself from a romanticism he both loves and despises. Nothing, in the history of criticism is more familiar than the spectacle of a poet turning in early middle age to justify his achievements and rationalize his failures, as Dryden had done - or, like Baudelaire and Eliot, to explore in prose notions for which, as poets, they felt themselves unready. Arnold's criticism begins in a more hostile spirit, in self-disgust, and his attack upon the rejected *Empedocles* in the 1853 preface, upon its extravagant subjectivity and its lack of action, is not much less than an attack upon the whole of his brief career as a poet.

He occupies a prominent place in the history of Literary Criticism.

From 1862, he began to publish a series of articles on single authors, which he collected in 1865 under the title of *Essays in Criticism*) and for this he wrote, as a provocative opening, 'The Function of Criticism at the Present Time' - his first formal statement of his critical position since the 1853 preface, and logically continuous from it. The 1865-6 lectures *On the Study of Celtic Literature* (1867) were an uninformed attempt to apply racial, anthropological standards to literary studies.

Arnold's criticism falls into three periods:

1. The First period (1853-1866) In this period he produced the following works:

a. The Preface to the *Poems* 1853

- b. On Translating Homer 1856
- c. Essays in Criticism, First Series 1865
- d. On the Study of Celtic Literature 1866

2. The Second Period

In this period he was involved for more than a decade in political, educational, social, and religious controversies of the day. The chief works of this period:

- a. Culture and Anarchy 1869
- b. St. Paul's Protestantism 1870 2
- c. Literature and Dogma 1873
- d. God and the Bible 1857

3. The Third Period In this period he retired from contemporary controversies and devoted himself once again to his literary studies. **Essay in Criticism, Second Series 1888**

In his 'The Function of Criticism at the present time' he had a speech about critics like, Wordsworth who was greatest critic himself, who has not left more criticism, Goethe who was the greatest critic who left so much criticism.

By the definition of criticism provided by Arnold, the task of a critic is threefold.

1. The first task is the critic's duty to learn, and for that, he must "see things as they really are".
2. The second task is to hand on this idea to others, to convert the world, to make "the best ideas prevail."
3. The third task requires the critic to create a favorable atmosphere for the creative genius of the future, by promoting "a current of ideas in the highest degree animating and nourishing to the creative power."

Without the prevalence of best ideas, there will be cultural anarchy.